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SUBJECT: UK SUPPORTIVE OF WHA PDAS KELLY'S VIEWS ON LATIN AMERICA

REF: LONDON 650

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Maura Connolly, reason 1.4, b/d.

¶1. (C) Summary. FCO Director of the Americas Chris Wood was supportive of U.S. policy on Latin America, praising progress in Colombia in particular during a visit by WHA PDAS Craig Kelly March 7. Wood agreed Venezuela and Bolivia were worrisome and that Cuba had not changed since Fidel's illness. But, he said, the EU "was as polarized as ever" on Cuba. HMG hoped the May EU-Latin America Summit would be made more productive by limiting its focus to climate change and poverty reduction, but Wood noted working with the region was frustratingly slow. End Summary.

Colombia

¶2. (C) FCO Director for the Americas Chris Wood told PDAS Craig Kelly, during a March 7 visit to London, that the UK supported U.S. efforts in Colombia, and he agreed that the security situation there is "leagues ahead" of what it was five years previously. HMG policy on Colombia is similarly focused, albeit smaller in scale, and despite significant domestic criticism, Wood believed the UK was "doing the right thing." HMG had tried to counter that criticism, with some success, by bringing Colombian labor leaders to the UK to explain how much better the security situation is in their country, despite continuing problems. While "nobody is above reproach in Colombia," Wood said, one UK NGO, Justice for Colombia, is beyond the pale in its criticism of the GOC. HMG seeks to make that point apparent to critics of HMG policy. In addition, HMG has told the Colombians they need to do more for themselves to improve Colombia's image.

¶3. (C) Kelly had just come from Paris and said that officials at the Quai and Elysee voiced support for President Uribe's overall campaign against FARC terrorism. French officials, however, also acknowledged that President Sarkozy's heavy focus on the Ingrid Betancourt case had become the primary focus of the GOF. That means that Colombian military actions will be viewed in terms of how they affect the situation of the hostages, and Betancourt in particular. Kelly noted that, publicly and privately, he had underscored strong U.S. support for Uribe's efforts against the FARC. In the meantime, ratification of the U.S.-Colombia Free Trade Agreement remained a top priority for the administration, and we were going to great lengths to point out the progress that President Uribe has made in stopping violence against labor leaders and ending impunity for those who commit it.

Venezuela

¶4. (C) Rupert Joy, FCO Head of the South America Team, posited that the referendum in Venezuela had weakened President Chavez, but the defeat did not signal "the beginning of the end," as some observers speculated. Kelly agreed that the opposition still lacked unity and that Chavez continued his efforts to accumulate power. It was clear that Chavez's continued verbal assaults on internal and external opponents were costing him. Opposition to Chavez is growing in the region, and the United States is letting that opposition build up while refraining from responding to daily diatribes, but remaining very clear about the importance of democratic principles. Our friends in the region strongly support that approach, Kelly added.

Bolivia

¶5. (C) Kelly expressed concern about Bolivia, particularly President Morales' handling of the constitutional reform process. The USG has tried to send the signal that there are concrete areas where we can cooperate, especially on counternarcotics, but Morales has chosen to use the United States as a foil in his attacks on the opposition. Kelly noted that the United States appreciates any European efforts to press Morales to refrain from using the United States as a tool and to govern according to the principles of the InterAmerican Democratic Charter. Wood noted that Morales often tells HMG that there are even more radical elements waiting in the wings, so HMG should appreciate the domestic opposition Morales must accommodate. Kelly and Wood agreed that Bolivia is critical to energy security in a region where supply and demand do not seem to link up.

Cuba

¶6. (C) Responding to Kelly's question, Wood said that HMG had objected to the European Commission giving Commissioner Louis Michel a "carte blanche" during his visit to Cuba (ref A). Rather he should have a clear EU policy to implement, but on Cuba, the EU was as polarized as ever. Wood did not know how Michel would balance meeting the opposition as well as the regime. The regime had taken a hard line of late, refusing to meet with officials who insist on meeting with the opposition. HMG suspected Michel would have one of his staff meet opposition leaders, so that Michel would be able to meet with the regime. Wood and Kelly agreed that little or nothing had changed in Cuba. Wood said there were some in the EU that sought further openings with the regime despite the lack of change. Joy asserted that much would depend on the Spanish elections. Wood noted that the issue of Cuba will be avoided during the May EU-Latin America Summit, which gives EU members only one month to prepare for review of the Common Position in June.

¶7. (C) Kelly reminded HMG that U.S. policy on Cuba has bipartisan support. We want to see a real transition toward democracy and an immediate release of all political prisoners, Kelly told his British counterparts. The United States feels strongly that the dissidents and the Cuban people must know there is international support behind their cause. Kelly noted the InterAmerican Democratic Charter is useful in pressuring OAS members to support democracy in Cuba.

EU in Latin America

¶8. (C) Wood noted that the EU's progress on a trade deal with the Andean countries was painfully slow. Peru and Colombia were "exasperated" by their regional neighbors. Nevertheless the EU was committed to achieving a deal with the entire bloc. Kelly noted that trade competition was healthy and wished the EU well.

¶9. (C) Wood said the EU-Latin America Summits tend to be long on speeches and short on achievements. Therefore, the EU was trying to focus May's summit on two manageable issues -- climate change and poverty reduction. HMG hoped limiting the focus would make the summit "meaty and practical," but Wood was not confident anything would come of it. He added that Brazil was a critical voice on these topics because it was not a huge carbon emitter but would disproportionately feel the effects of climate change. All the countries were keen to discuss poverty reduction. Kelly said the Santiago Summit had achieved quite a lot, despite the headlines, and hoped the EU would succeed in focusing on concrete issues.

¶10. (U) PDAS Kelly has cleared this cable.

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